

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 30, 2006

The Honorable Michael Johanns
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

As you know, we represent agricultural states with many farm families that depend on a strong farm safety net. We believe that openness and transparency in the distribution of our farm payments is important to maintaining the public's confidence in, and the integrity of, our farm programs.

That is why we were troubled by recent news reports which suggested that USDA may have made more than \$2.8 billion in improper farm payments last year.

Although we understand that the vast majority of these payments were classified as improper due to incomplete or missing paperwork, we are concerned by reports that the Farm Service Agency may not have sufficient resources to avoid making improper farm payments. For example, Farm Service Agency Administrator Teresa Lasseter was quoted in the press as saying "Certainly, better-trained [FSA] staff with more tools to do their jobs would help us."

We would like your evaluation of what additional staff and resources would be necessary to ensure that our farm payments are made as accurately and efficiently as possible. And as USDA develops its budget proposal for FY08, we urge you to request whatever resources you believe are necessary to do so. As members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee, respectively, we are ready to work with you to help make our farm program as accurate and transparent as possible.

Sincerely,


Charles Grassley
United States Senate


Byron L. Dorgan
United States Senate